

Thoughts and Reveries

of an

...American Bluejacket...

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by

Ernest Vincent Wright, U. S. N.





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THE LONESOME BLUEJACKET

Great multitudes who cheer and weep
And smile thro' tear-dimmed eye,
Line curb and windows, waving flags,
To bid the boys good-bye.
With martial music from the bands,
The khaki-lads sweep past,
While parents look, with sinking hearts,
And sweethearts stand aghast.

Thus goes the Army. Still, howe'er,
Another force must go.
Brave fellows too; proud, vigorous, strong.
Yet they're sent, devoid of show.
No blaring bands, no waving hands,—
'Tis lonesome as can be
At midnight in the Navy Yard
When the Fleet puts out to sea!

Shore leave is o'er some hours before,
And all whose homes are near,
Have taken leave in privacy
Of those they hold most dear.
But wait! Do all *have* folks to leave?
Nay! Many there are like me,
With no one living now, to care
When the Fleet puts out to sea.

In spite of guards, police and such,
Some suffering feminine hearts
Plunge madly down the gloomy pier
Just as the vessel starts.
With anguished gaze they scan the crew,—
But nay! It is not for me;—
Since mother died there's no one now
Cares *when* I go to sea.

Oh, for a fluttering handkerchief!
Oh, for a heart-felt sigh;
At the gang-plank! Oh, for a farewell kiss
When the order comes,—“Stand by!”
How I crave a pair of clinging arms
To revive the Soul in me!
To hold on tight, like they'd forbid
The Fleet to put to sea!

Oh, well! Maybe when "over there,"
Where enemy submarines swarm,
I'll do my part as well as those
Who have some "folks at home."
Home? Ah, God! That wondrous place
Which mother made for me!
Henceforth 'tis where I hang my hat
When the Fleet puts out to sea!

The great ships carry ponderous guns
And thousands of tons of coal,
But the heaviest thing by far on board
Is a lonely sailor's Soul!
And when we're back, the boys will rush
Into yearning arms they'll see,
But I'll take a nap; nobody cares
When I come back from sea!



A SAILOR'S FRIENDS AT SEA

When the fleet steams out at sunset
And the sea is red and gold:
When the dying day brings phantoms
Of those happier days of old;
When timid stars are peeping
Through the haze above the sea—
Ah! Then departed loved ones
Come back—to comfort me.

When the true steel grey of twilight
Spans the horizon's rim
I see Dad's noble countenance
And raise my eyes to him.
The grandeur of the cloud-fields
Recalls his love for me—
And I love to feel he's watching
As I'm way, way out at sea.

And when two tiny starlets
Like sleepy babies blink
My two wee sisters gaze at me,
Their minds too young to think;
Yet watching, with their cherub eyes,
As the dusk enshrouds the sea,
I love to feel their innocence
As a guardian over me.
But ah! When wondrous splendor
Has set the heavens ablaze!
When scarlet, purple, green and pink
Are pierced by golden rays!
Look there! Up high! Way over all!
Ah, God! Thou art good to me
To thus bring Mother's face—to cheer
And guide me—out at sea!
Alas! They're but sweet memories now,
So I'll sail on each day;
Knowing my sunset visitors will
For the lonely days repay.
And when the fleet half-masts its flags
As it's apt to do—for me
I'll try to cheer some sailor lad,
As I gaze down on the sea

OLD GLORY'S BRIDE

Old Glory, long the Nation's pride,
Supreme throughout the land so wide,
Standing for Liberty, Peace and Love,
Its record pure as the skies above,
Comes, at last, to that stage of life
Where he feels the need of a helpful wife
To carry, with him, at least a share
Of the many burdens he has to bear.
So, in looking round, his leading thought
Was that the lady surely ought
To match his own complexion; so
He looked for one who'd cheeks aglow
In red and white. Then, to his mind,
Came the idea that could he find
One blest with eyes like stars, she'd be
The essence of propriety.

He found her; for he did not lag,
And he called his bride "The Service Flag."
Quoth he, "I'll call the fighters out.
I'll lead them as they march and shout,
I'll spur them on thro' battle's heat,
For I have never known defeat!
I'll show this fighting, war-mad age
The finest troops of History's page!"
"And," quoth his gentle bride, "I'll stay
Outside their homes by night and day.
I'll tell the world they've made the start
And left home with a hero's heart!
I'll show a star for every man,
So get me every one you can!
While you, my brave, go forth to roam
Your wife's place is, you know, at home."

So let's all hail Old Glory's mate!
And let no person hesitate
To give salute when passing by,
A home from which she's seen to fly.
For in those homes the hearts are sad,
Yet swelled with hope that every lad
May soon return, to see, with pride,
His star upon Old Glory's bride!



STRANDS OF BLUE

1

Why do we hear, "Help the khaki lads!"
And "The boys who are over there?"
Why does the slogan "Trenches first!"
Ring out at you everywhere?
Why is it ninety-nine per cent
Of the knit goods are of brown?
Is it because brown khaki suits
Are common sights in town?

2

But now and then, God bless her soul,
 Some noble little heart,
 Knits strands of blue! So, maybe, then
 There is *another* part
 Of the fighting forces of the land!
 Why, certainly! Hadn't you heard
 Of the great ships waiting off the coast,—
 Just waiting for the word?

3

'Tis cold in trenches, deep with mud,
 In a ditch up to your neck;
 But didn't you know? Oh, dear me! Yes,
 It's also cold on deck
 Of a speeding lank torpedo-boat,
 Racing along its way!
 And the cold gets at your "innards"
 If you stand there night and day.

4

"Boys in the trenches!" Tell me, please,
 How they *got* "over there!"
 They couldn't march; they didn't swim;
 Well, well, now, I declare!
 It must have been the Navy lads!
 Yes! Sure! That's how it came,
 That half a million khaki lads
 Got there to play the game!

5

The Navy lads! The happy lads,
 Who sing and scrap and dance!
 With hats shaped like a blueberry pie
 And their floppy, floppy pants!
 Oh! They're *real* boys of sterling build;
 Who, while the "khakis" sleep,
 Shiver, while hunting periscopes,—
 Those terrors of the deep!

5

Hurrah! I say, for the Army lads!
 All honor their suits of brown!
 Their courage, skill, integrity,
 Are objects of renown.
 But *also* "Hurrah!" loud and strong,
 For the brave bluejackets, too!
 And "*hats off*" to the little girl
 With her needles "cast on" with blue!



AT SEA

Is a sailor lonely at sea? Ah! ask
 Of many a hundred men
 Whose folks are dead, whose one-time friends
 Will not think of them again.
 When the mail arrives 'tis a joyous hour
 For all but those, like me,
 Who have few blood-ties left, to write;—
 Ah! Then 'tis lonely at sea!

But look! A note from an unknown friend!
 (Or a post-card which cost a penny)
 And *your name is called* by the letter-clerk
 Instead of the gruff "Not any!"
 How your name gleams out on the envelope
 As in days that used to be
 When all the departed loved ones wrote—
 Before it was lonely at sea!

A chance may come when maybe I
 Some valorous act may do
 Receiving, perhaps, an honor badge
 'Midst the plaudits of the crew.
 Yet, where's the joy? No praise from "Dad."
 No mother's smile for me—
 Only a headline, perhaps, in print—
 And it's lonelier still—at sea!

Some day the ship will start for "home,"
How that word makes you start
When months and years its sound has not
Been known inside your heart!
Of course our home's aboard the ship.
Canst call it "home"? Ah, me!
'Tis slander, almost, on the word—
My! It's lonely at sea!"

THE POWER OF A SMILE

When your lonely and downhearted
With your folks all dead and gone,
And question whether living's worth the while;
When the world seems cold and boundless
Though it's filled with others' joys,
How you crave the warming sunshine of a
smile!

After years of heartsick longing
For the friendly welcome hand,
The warmth of which upon your own remains,
If you meet it unexpectedly
How vain to even try
To analyze the Power it contains!

How this hand and smile do reach
The deep spots of your heart,
Where cold and chill and hopelessness have
dwelt!
What true, wholehearted beams of light
Shine from a true friend's face,
When trying to make a welcome really felt!

Then, see! The world seems brightening!
Like darkness before dawn,
The clouds of loneliness are fading fast;
The world seems almost rosy!
For smiles straight from a heart
Can melt the wildest, coldest wintry blast.

All the public orators
Who ever stirred the world,
Or poets with their sonnets that beguile,
Cannot in all their glory
Even *partially* exert
A fraction of the power of a smile.

True welcome is a simple thing;—
A smile of beaming warmth,
A twinkling of the eyes, and that is all;
But with it comes that wondrous thing,
That magic clasp of hand,
Before which icy loneliness must fall.

And so you'll find where'er you go,
No matter who you meet,
The welcome there will never be worth while,
Without that curious "something,"—
That heaven-sent mystery
Which puts such mighty power in a smile!

FOR BRAVERY?

My little boy has died. The fight
Was over in an hour;
The great ships circled, raced and belched
Their holocausts of power.
Whilst admiral and captain ruled
He waved flags at their side,
Just as he used to at my knee;—
But now "little boy" has died!

My "little" boy? Yes! Such he was!
Though he was twenty-three,
I saw him only as a babe,
Just "little boy" to me!
And when his puppet soldiers fell,
He'd stop if he saw I "cried."
But, oh! These great ships didn't stop;—
And—my little boy has died!

Ah! What could he do? Why was he there?
With his little flags to wave?
He used to play with wee flags once,
And march round, big and brave,
While I—I watched and guided him
‘Till he slumbered at my side,
I must have slumbered too; for now,
My little boy has died.

My little boy with his waving flags
Has wandered from my knee.
His little flags were found with him,
As he floated on the sea.
They’re having a medal made for me,
Inscribed upon one side
“For bravery!” Nay! Put there, instead,
“My little boy has died.”

ODE TO MY SWEATER

1

Cling round my form, oh, vest of wool;
You, who have come to me
From some unknown but generous friend
As I’m ready for the sea.
Who sent you here? What? Speak up, loud!
Where are the nimble hands
That made you, you warm-hearted thing,
From simple woolen strands?

2

Was it in school at recess time
She passed all games aside,
To “cast on eighty-four,” to start
You, object of her pride?
Or was it at some college dance
She wove your walls of grey?
Or was she on a bed of pain?
Oh, say not so, I pray!

Were you made by a glowing hearth
 With lights down, soft and low?
 And did she sing, and gently rock
 A cradle with her toe?
 Or were you born in a trolley car
 With its clang and bang and lurch?
 Or (whisper softly in my ear),
 Sh-h! Were you made *in church*?

Don't tell me she was old and poor
 And great privations stood
 To save the money for the yarn
 To make you thick and good!
 Whatever the story of your birth
 Please, *please* don't be so mean,
 Even if true, to say that you
 Were *made on a machine*!

May every blessing, every joy,
 And every happiness be
 The just reward of her, who sent
 You here, old chap, to me.
 And when your loving, clinging strands
 Around my form are curled,
 They'll prove American women are
 The finest in the world!

HANGING THE FLAG

Should the star-field hang to right or left?
 Is asked by those of reason bereft.
 You'll find Old Glory, no matter how tied,
 Is *never* "back-to"; *has no* "wrong side!"
 Its stars, in battle, shone just as bright,
 Whether flown to left or waved to right.
 Whichever side's exposed to view
 Its message of "Liberty" gleams at you!
Forget how the Star-Spangled Banner is
 hung!
 Put your energies into *getting it sung*!
 Take out your flag from box or shelf
 (Or *buy* one today, if you've none, yourself);
 Hang it left or right, on pole or screen,
 But GET IT UP SOMEHOW, where it can be seen!

THE MASTERPIECE

The Angels of Heaven, so they say
Congregated one glorious day
On a vast expanse of snowy clouds.
They came in groups, they came in crowds;
For a contest, open to all, was on
To see who best could improve upon
The wonderful, exquisite things
That throng the glorious Realms of Wings.
One angel, noble and grand to see
Displayed a beautiful flowering tree;
Another a statue of fairy grace,—
Wondrous of form, grand of face.
Others exhibited works of art,
And lots of them chose the human heart
As being more beautiful, as itself,
Than anything known by man or elf.
As the contest waged the multitudes
Flocked to display their wondrous goods
With "Oh's" and "Ah's" from far and wide,
Till look! Came an angel from one side,
Hiding beneath her folded wing,
Everyone felt, some exquisite thing.
And the multitudes around her whirled
As she delicately her wing unfurled.
What was it? Radiance most serene,
Or Art such angels ne'er had seen?
Or was it a burst of music grand?
Or a blossom supreme, made by her hand?
And why was that mighty concourse stilled
With admiration; and rapture filled,
As the Angel, known as Goodness, stood
In the midst of that eager multitude?
A Soul emerged from beneath her wing.
It stood there in that mighty ring,
A girlish figure in purest white
Surrounded by a wondrous light
Of Loyalty, Charity, Truth and Strength
Of character, Love, until, at length
The ring closed in with a joyous whirl,—
And named the prize—"the American Girl!"

THE NAVY'S CHRISTMAS TREE

1

It quietly came aboard, unseen,
This wonderful, beautiful thing,
And lay in hiding throughout the day
Huddled in some dark passageway,
With its carols all ready to sing.
Through the terrible Dreadnaught, solely built
To belch forth fire and death,
The crew were lying in groups about,
Their minds on Christmas at home, no doubt,
With, perchance, a catch of the breath.

'Twas all so cruel, cold and hard,
The sea so bare, so vast,
It could not be that Christmas-tide
Could find them on that waste so wide,
And they fell asleep,—at last.
But oh! Behold! When they awoke
There, in their wondering gaze
It stood; a beautiful thing of love,
Bringing its message of peace above,—
Shedding its love-lit rays!

2

Its scented boughs poured on the air,
So pregnant with oil and steam,
The real home odor of shady woods.
It banished all thought of worldly goods;
It stood there; a crystalized dream!
It whispered softly of peace on earth
In this fortress of hell-fire here.
But through its smiles, each tinsel rope
Gradually drooped with departing hope,
And each crystal turned to a tear!
Glistening tears were these tinsels gay
Which bravely their smiles had kept;
But cannon and machine-guns, glum,
Told of such bloodshed sure to come,
That even the candles wept!

"Oh! Load these cannon with love!" they
cried,
"Instead of powder; and then
Let go a broadside of Christmas joys
That will smother the loudest battle's noise!"
And the sailors sighed, "Amen!"



MY GUARDIAN

Since mother died I've often seen
While gazing o'er the sea,
Resplendent in the racing foam
Her figure, watching me.
It follows me thro storm and sun,
It rides on the fleecy foam,
And o'er the roar of the surf, I hear,
Her plaintive plea, "Come home!"

Full well, I know, when battle comes,
And our vessel belches flame,
From every port, still shall I see
My vision just the same.
Bright as a light-ray from the Throne
'Twill shine thro the smoky air,
Exalted, itself, o'er earthly harm,
Freed from all mortal care.

And some day, should some mighty shell
Snuff out my lonely life,
My vision will vacate at once
The scenes of blood and strife;
And when I fall, she'll quickly come
Thro gas and smoke and gloam,
With outstretched hand,—and I'll obey
Her *joyous* cry,—“Come home!”





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